

Summary Notes from Forestry/Fuels JMLA Implementation Meeting 6:30 PM, March 1st, 2007 at the Central Montana Community Center

Bruce Reid, BLM Forester provides introduction at 6:40 p.m.

Bruce introduces:

- June Bailey, BLM Lewistown Field Office Manager
- Pat Harty, BLM Fuels Specialist
- Willy Frank, BLM Assistant Field Office Manager – Resources
- Brian Stevens, BLM Engine Foreman – Gunnison Colorado
- Tom Stivers, Region 4 MT Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Lewistown Area Wildlife Biologist
- Amy Eckert, Note taker
- Brad Eckert, BLM Forester
- Jennifer Walker, BLM Fire Ecologist
- Ron Buck, DNRC Forester
- Joe Platz, BLM Fisheries Biologist – Miles City
- Craig Flentie, BLM Public Affairs

About 25 non-BLM people are in attendance.

Bruce asks if anyone is here from the Fergus Conservation District. No one is.

This is a collaborative effort endorsed by the Fergus Conservation District. Ron Buck, Forester with the DNRC is also here and has provided copies of the Montana Guide to Streamside Management Zone Law and Rules. If you do not already have a copy, please take one from the center table before you leave tonight.

Tonight we will try to stick to the agenda in the letter that we sent out, but feel free to ask questions and discuss topics as we go along.

Bruce provides a summary of last meeting:

- The BLM finished the NEPA analysis (the Judith-Moccasin Landscape Analysis) and the decision record was signed.
- Active forest management has been approved within the boundary of this analysis.
- Projects are ready to implement, but we thought that we should collaborate, bring people on board, and move forward in a team effort.
- Hard copies of the invitation letter, agenda, and minutes of the last meeting are available on the center table.

At the last meeting, we were requested to go ahead and propose projects that we want to see go forward. Even though we feel that there is a risk of coming across as if we have already made our minds up, we did go ahead and prepare a priority proposal to discuss tonight.

There was also concern over the length of time these projects take. Projects do take multiple years and involve multiple steps and often involve people coming and going, and budget constraints.

There was some skepticism and comments about “too much talk” and not enough action, but we assured you that that is not our intent. We are dedicated to these projects.

As we get going on projects, it is essential that the BLM retain responsibility for BLM lands and follow rules we have to follow. If we can't agree as a group, when it comes to signing contracts and making decisions concerning public lands, the agency retains ultimate authority. Legally, we cannot give up this authority.

Please pick up a copy of the Judith-Moccasin Landscape Analysis Decision Record before you leave tonight, if you have not already done so. The document provides a nice overview of the larger Landscape Analysis.

In a number of the handouts available tonight, we put down the address of the website that we're in the process of putting together. The website gets you into the NEPA analysis. Within a couple of weeks we also hope to make relevant maps and meeting invitation letters, agendas, and minutes available on this website. The address is <<http://www.mt.blm.gov/ldo/fire/eaindex.html>>.

The Decision Record also contains information about other decisions concerning grazing permit renewals and a number of decisions that were already made, but during this collaboration process we will be talking primarily about forest management.

Are there any questions?

Q: How is Shannon Downey involved?

Ans: Shannon left the BLM to take a job with the DNRC in Helena. Jennifer Walker, Brad Eckert, and I are heading up this effort. Shannon was involved in the planning stage of the JMLA and she was the team lead that prepared the Judith-Moccasin Landscape Analysis (JMLA). This collaboration effort is different in that we are now working together to implement projects in areas covered in the JMLA.

Brad Eckert, BLM Forester:

Bruce just covered the JMLA because there was a suggestion at the last meeting to provide an overview of what is in this document. For the same reason, we brought copies of the Decision Record and copies of the Montana Guide to the Streamside Management Zone Law and Rules.

How many of you did your homework? An individual volunteered that he did.

Please make sure you're on our sign in sheet if you didn't get the homework assignment.

If you are here for the first time, there are copies of the agenda for our last meeting along with invitation letters and meeting minutes. These handouts help those who are here for the first time and wondering what the big picture is. Simply put, though, our overall objective is to work together to implement projects in areas covered in the JMLA and to implement better projects than we would have done if we had implemented them without your help. When I say "working together," I mean not only planning here at meetings, but also working on the ground together. For example, we flag unit boundaries together or paint cut and leave trees.

Tonight's objectives are more specific, however. We want to discuss why we want to treat, where we want to treat, and what we want to do – in short, the why, where, and what. I will lead a discussion on why we want to treat. Jennifer and Bruce will follow and help us to reach consensus on what our top priority projects are. Then, I will begin to present the what by outlining typical steps projects involve.

So, let's begin by discussing why we want to treat. The way we will do this is by answering the question posed in the invitation letter to this meeting: What do you think a healthy forest in the Judith Mountains would look like or what would the ideal forest in this area be like?

Members of the group responded as follows:

The ideal forest in the Judith Mountains would be characterized by:

- vegetative diversity
 - o Species diversity
 - o Forest structural diversity
- multiple canopy layers
- multiple age classes
- fire resistant conditions
- a minimal number of roads
- an established trail system
- healthy wildlife populations
- minimal weeds
- hard woods (deciduous species)
- conditions that were present pre-1805
 - o more open forest
 - o healthy streams and supported ecosystems
- minimal bugs and disease
- sustainability of renewable resource use
 - o sustained timber yield
 - o other resource use

Brad asked whether any of these characteristics conflict. Tom Stivers suggested that we may not want to reproduce conditions that existed pre-1805. Brad agreed that a lot has changed since 1805. First, the climate probably is somewhat different now, and second, human values and objectives are different today. Brad continued to say that there are specific characteristics of the pre-1805 forest that we probably do want to manage for and can easily agree on. For example, providing more open forest conditions and providing healthy streams are desirable goals.

The key take home message of the above exercise is that we have a lot in common and are working for many of the same things. This is important to remember as we discuss project specifics at future meetings and cover details that we may not initially agree on. As we work to reach consensus on those issues, remember that we share similar big picture goals and share common visions of the ideal Judith Mountain forest.

Jennifer Walker, BLM Fire Ecologist:

We want to let you know that there are projects in various stages of planning and implementation. We hope to work closely with you on all new projects, but there are others that we want to let you know about up front, so we do not give the impression that we are hiding anything. We have placed projects in three categories:

- The first category, category A includes projects that have already begun or projects that are so far along in the planning stage that funding has been allocated and we feel obligated to continue. We feel strongly that we should continue with these projects as planned.

- We have committed ourselves to completing the North Moccasin Salvage Sale, which was planned following blowdown in 2003. Logging treatments are complete, but the contractor still must blade the access road that was built during this sale with part of the sale revenue. A contractor will be hired to clean up slash in some areas. The BLM fire crew will also do some light thinning of the understory to remove low quality trees and ladder fuels, clean up slash in some areas, pile burn, and prescribe burn the units. Under the old salvage sale contract (vs. the new option of stewardship contracts), exchange of goods for services (logs for fuels treatment/slash work) was not possible. On future stewardship projects, service work will generally be built into the main contract and completed concurrently with the forest thinning treatment.
 - We have also committed ourselves to completing the Camp Maiden fuel break. Pat Harty (fuels specialist) is heading up fuel treatment efforts in this area. The fire crew did some thinning in a narrow fuel break. They plan to expand that fuel break and also treat Collar Gulch.
 - Finally, we have committed to supporting Joe Platz' project in Collar Gulch, which involves: (1) mechanical treatment to encourage hardwood growth, (2) stream channel re-alignment to facilitate trout passage around an historic dam and to reduce the risk of the dam failing, which could lead to a large sediment flush and pose an unacceptable risk to the trout population, and (3) log placement in streams to cause scouring and provide pools for trout habitat.
- The second category, category B, includes projects that we would like to complete, but have not yet committed to. We are somewhat flexible with projects in this group. The only project that falls into this category is the Park Place Timber Sale. We've had this site culturally cleared and the project ties in nicely with work being done on state land. Initial field work, including boundary layout, has also been completed.
 - The third category, category C, includes new projects and projects that are in early stages of planning. We are extremely flexible with projects in this category.

What we need to do now is to identify our top priority project. This could include commercial harvest, thinning, a variety of service work, aquatic restoration, and roads. The project area could be huge or we could break projects up into phases. Our suggestion is to begin by treating the area around the Maiden Girl Scout Camp, and then possibly expand into Collar Gulch and then Alpine Gulch.

Bruce Reid:

As requested at the last meeting, Bruce presented a map and showed where the project area is that the BLM is proposing as the highest priority.

This is just a draft. Lines were quickly drawn on this map to show the general area of the Maiden Project. The area includes the forty acres of the Maiden Girl Scout Camp and the surrounding forest, the hill slope to the left (west) of the camp. The project as drawn would include about 750 acres of public ground. This project could lead down into other areas, including alpine gulch. In conjunction w/the state, we've could treat everything up that narrow road and take a huge step in making that local community more fire safe. The area shown within the drawn boundary is our suggestion as to where we might start. The area is within the wildland/urban interface and the area does not have any access issues.

Q: What is the treatment for a stand that is just lodgepole?

Ans: Bruce – Lodgepole in an even age stand is commonly clearcut. The species is shade intolerant and may not regenerate in the understory. The species is also susceptible to blowdown, so on windy sites or sites with potentially heavy snow/ice loads, thinning is not appropriate. Where Douglas-fir is present in the understory, however, thinning or overstory removal may be a good option when a Douglas-fir stand is desirable. When we are confident that a certain area is sheltered from the wind, then we may try to thin lodgepole pine and open the stand up significantly. Other considerations such as tree height to diameter ratio (tree resistance to wind and heavy snow/ice loads), crown health, tree form, and insect and disease problems are also important. If we did thin a pure lodgepole pine stand, underburning would be especially important to encourage tree regeneration. We will be better able to discuss treatments when we are talking about specific projects areas, or better yet when we are on the ground together. In some areas small clearcuts are more appropriate than in other areas. They may help us attain some of our goals, but not others.

Bruce: Hopefully we can avoid spending a lot of time doing 5-10 acre patches of forest treatments. If we can focus in on a larger area, we can save time and meet objectives in the NEPA.

Jennifer Walker: Are there any project ideas?

Public Comment: Fuel reduction is important. Also, there appears to be beetle kill behind my land. Treating large areas is a good idea.

Jennifer: Q – how much beetle kill?

Bruce: Ans – There are scattered small patches, or hits from beetles.

Individual offered to show everyone where the beetle kill is.

Q: I am concerned about invasive weeds behind my house, including hounds tongue and thistle. The area is by the creek that comes down through Thompson's near Lincoln Creek and Poor Creek peak and also near the hill to the east. The private land was logged. Part of the problem area is BLM and part is private. The weeds are very bad.

Jennifer: We need to go look.

Individual: I am happy to show you the area.

Jennifer: This is something that after we pick a project and move forward, we have to develop a weed treatment strategy for the seed source

Brad: Stewardship projects allow us to trade goods for services. We can earn money, break even, or pay money depending on the value of the timber harvested and the extent of the service work. Before the next meeting we will consider what our options are for treating bug infested areas that one individual pointed out. We will also see what our options are in terms of treating weeds behind the other landowner's place.

Brad: Q – Is anyone opposed to treating bugs or weeds in these cases we've discussed?

Ans: No one is opposed.

Q: Is there a way to help private landowners obtain tools to treat weeds?

Ans: Jennifer – We struggle with that issue. We go into agreements with permittees and we can make a difference this way because you need to treat larger areas to be successful.

Q: Can we work together to combine weed patches? Working with a bunch of agencies complicated weed treatment.

Ans: Jennifer – We can work together to start programs. Weeds is a topic we will be addressing thoroughly. The priority right now is to pick up a topic area.

Jennifer: Q – Is everyone comfortable with moving ahead with BLM ideas? Is the Maiden area a good area to start?

Group: Ans – There is general agreement that Maiden is a good place to start.

Bruce: Is placing Park Place Timber Sale up top in the priority list also okay? There are 28 acres adjacent to the state section that has just been treated. Treating the BLM land would make sense.

Comment: I'm not keen on more traffic, but I agree.

Q: When do you plan on doing the committed projects, including the mentioned fuel treatments?

Ans. Jennifer and Bruce – We will implement committed projects simultaneously with the Maiden Project we just discussed.

Q: Has the area west of the road been culturally cleared?

Ans: Bruce – both sides of the roads going around Maiden have been cleared culturally, but the exact boundaries of the project have yet to be defined.

Joe Platz: Our archeologist (Zane Fulbright) has more work to do to complete his survey of the entire project area. Identification of not only mining relicts, but also Indian artifacts is important.

Bruce: What if we call the new project the Maiden Stewardship Project? Brad, Jennifer, and I will come up with a more specific proposal to discuss at our next meeting. We will propose more precise treatment unit boundaries and silvicultural prescriptions. We could also talk about access.

Q: Joe Platz – would anyone be interested in articles on logging and sedimentation of streams and logging systems?

Brad: We will be flexible (within legal and procedural sideboards) and modify project proposals as appropriate based on discussion at future meetings. In response to concerns that have been raised so far tonight, before our next (April meeting) we will:

1. Talk to Lowell Hassler, our weeds specialist and to the Fergus Conservation District to see what our options are.
2. We will see what we can find out about working across ownerships and coordinating treatment of weeds. One individual agreed to check with the Fergus Conservation District and provide an update at the next meeting.
3. I do want to clarify why some projects are committed. We feel an obligation to complete certain projects because either: (1) a contract has already been signed and we are legally obligated, or (2) planning has already progressed to the point where money has been allocated. Within the BLM bureaucracy this is a big deal, and we do not want to move the money if we don't have to. We're letting you know what the projects are that we've essentially committed to already so you know what is going on.

4. So, this evening we identified our common vision of a healthy, ideal forest in the Judith Mountains and we narrowed down the location of our top priority project. Although we will not talk about project specifics until next time, I want to introduce typical steps involved in any project. Doing so may help us to start thinking about concerns we may have related to project design and implementation. Going through the steps may also help you visualize how you may want to be involved in the future.

Typical project steps involve:

- Locating and marking unit boundaries
- Conducting an inventory of vegetation on site
- Identifying what species to cut and leave
- Identifying what size classes of trees to cut and leave
- Identifying target stand density (residual trees per acre)
- Painting cut and leave trees
- Cruising merchantable timber volume marked to cut
- Prepare, offer, and award a contract
- Administer contract
- Monitor implementation, mitigation measures, and treatment effects

If the project involves prescribed burning, then additional steps are taken:

- Write burn plans
- Prepare the site for burning by treating excessive slash and pulling slash back from fences and other improvements
- Burn when the weather satisfies conditions prescribed in the burn plan and when sufficient qualified personnel are available

Q: Brad – Are there any questions?

Q: Generally tree marking is part of the stewardship contract, but folks may be getting the idea that they're going to mark trees?

Brad: There's a choice there, we can go either way. At the very least, we will mark a sample area to provide an example for the contractor. In other cases the site is very visible to the public, and checking on the contractor a few times a week is not sufficient. Then we will mark to ensure that the trees we personally would select to leave are not cut. In other cases, we have to balance the demands on the BLM Foresters' time versus any added expense of requiring the contractor to select trees according to a lengthy written description. Deciding what trees to cut to satisfy our prescription will require more thought on the part of the logger and as a result possibly cost more. In addition, when trees are not marked, contract administration becomes more time consuming, so the cost benefit of marking by description is not always as expected.

Comment: DNRC will often only mark trees when the pulp market is up, to ensure that certain smaller trees will be left.

Bruce: The BLM can write the contract in such a way to require that certain trees be left even if they are not painted.

Brad: Homework –

If you are interested, please read the Montana Guide to the Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) Law and Rules booklet for next time. Over the last 15 to 20 years different states came up with SMZ laws designed to reduce sediment delivery to streams associated with poor logging practices. Ron Buck will be the guest speaker at our next meeting. Also, if you are interested, please read the JMLA Decision Record. We will discuss both of these next time and answer any questions you may have. If we get the proposed project plan ready in time, we may even post a map and silvicultural prescriptions on our website.

Q: Brad – Are there any final questions?

Q: (to Joe) – what are the next projects you have planned?

Ans: Joe – There are two projects. The first involves placing wood in Collar Gulch stream to encourage deeper pools and provide fish cover. Fish are getting smaller and we think this is because decreasing pool depth and water flow. The second project involves channel relocation to bypass the old historic dam. The intent is to preclude formation of a headcut and subsequent dam failure. Once a headcut is initiated the dam is likely to fail quickly. Failure of the dam could lead to sedimentation which would threaten the best cutthroat habitat. The dam is also a partial fish barrier. We want to go around the dam and create a new fish friendly channel and leave the historic dam where it's at.

Q: Are you concerned that high spring runoff may move the logs placed in the streams?

Ans: Joe – We look for areas that already have small pools and place logs there. We also try to tie them in to tree butts so they are less likely to move and we work with landowners.

Q: Brad – Do logs provide most benefit during high flow?

Ans: Joe – Not necessarily. Most scouring does take place during high flow, but logs also provide cover and fish use the pools during periods of low flow.

Q: What is scour?

Ans: Joe – Scour is the digging of action as once it goes over a log and then falls down quickly on the downstream side of the log.

Q: Will a backhoe be used to excavate the new stream channel?

Ans: Joe – A small skidder and excavator will be used.

An individual mentions the importance of road access down into Collar Gulch for people who want to look for trout.

Brad reminds the individual that Rod Sanders, the team lead for the ongoing Judith-Moccasin Travel Plan effort is present and that he should speak with Rod and also submit comments.

Jennifer: Ron will present information at our next meeting on MT SMZs. At our next meeting we will also answer questions on the JMLA Decision Record and discuss the Maiden Stewardship Project in more detail. Remember the website that should be up soon. The site will have links to references. Feel free to do internet searches on related topics such as SMZs and MT BMPs also.

Q: Next time could we discuss the role of the resource advisory committee and their involvement?

Ans: Jennifer – Yes

Please remember to sign in. Also, we keep getting returned letters. Please let us know if you know the address of anyone on our list.

Jennifer: We are tentative planning a regular schedule to meet the 2nd Thursday of every month at 6:30? How does this work for you?

Comment: The 2nd Thursday of each month does not work.

BLM folks decided they would think about a different date for next time and propose a couple of alternative meeting schedules to discuss next time.

Bruce: Please come to the next meeting with your calendars prepared to discuss meeting dates.

Q: Jennifer – Do we stick with the community center? There is a fee to use this building, so we are considering other options, including the BLM Office.

Public Comment: The BLM is a good place to meet and meeting there will save the taxpayer money.

Bruce: We are getting down to a working group of interested folks so maybe we can meet at the office. We will do at least one more mass mailing to ensure that all stakeholders are informed of the meeting time and location. Expect another invitation letter from us with details about the next meeting. In addition, our web site should be up soon.

Thank you for your help and participation tonight.